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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, March 6, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MOTH FIGHTING." Information from the Bureau of Entomology, U.S.D.A.

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A skeptical housewife asked me the other day just how valuable cedar chests are against moths. I took that question over to the moth experts in the Bureau of Entomology and here's what they replied. They said that a good cedar chest made of red cedar heartwood at least three-fourths of an inch thick with a tight cover of solid red cedar will kill newly hatched or very young larvae. But you can't depend on it to kill the moth in its flying stage or to kill the eggs or even to destroy the little eating larvae after they are half or full grown. It's only the very young babies in the family, you see, that succumb in even the best cedar chest. That's why the experts suggest that a cedar chest is useful for prevention rather than cure. They say only clean clothes, absolutely free from moth eggs and worms when they go in, are safe in these chests.

And while we're on the subject, let's mention another article that's good for prevention rather than cure. That's a so-called "moth proof" bag. The purpose of a bag of this sort is not to kill moths but to keep them out. So a bag made of plain heavy paper is just as safe as a tar-paper bag or a bag treated with cedar or pine oil. The value of the bag is in its tightness. Be sure it has no tiny hole around the hanger at the top where a very small insect could crawl through. Be sure all corners are secure. Be sure its fastening is absolutely tight. Then put in clothes that are clean and free from all moth eggs.

The moth experts tell me that many people each year waste a lot of good time and money putting their clothes up in worthless moth remedies and then have trouble with moths just the same. Here are some of the things that have no effect on moths: tobacco extracts, dried lavender flowers, cayenne and black pepper, allspice, salt, borax, eucalyptus leaves and red cedar leaves. Your own government experts have tried all these out carefully and find that they don't effect the moth's health and appetite at all.

The cheapest and most successful way to fight moths is absolute cleanliness and a tight clean place to store your clothes. The two substances that moths don't like are napthalene and paradichlorobenzene (para-di-chloro-benzene), properly used.

Moths do thousands of dollars worth of damage every year. They're small but very dangerous and expensive guests to have around your house. Yet the battle against them is simple if you use cleanliness as the weapon. If you clean all your wool clothes -- wash or dry-clean them, or carefully brush, air and sun them - and then if you put them away in moth-proof containers, you don't need to have any fear of taking them out next fall full of holes. The same is true of your furs. Brush, air, and sun them carefully before you put them away.

The forgotten clothes are the ones that often suffer the most from moths. You see, what happens each spring is that the moths get in their meals on the garments you leave too long before you clean and put them away. Give a moth a soiled article of wool or fur and a quiet dark place and he'll just settle down happily to growing fat and raising a family in comfort. Those wool socks that Jack wore a couple of times and then left in the back of the drawer, that suit of Mary's with a spot or two on it hanging in the back of the closet until she finds a convenient time to clean it, Father's Sunday trousers hanging in a dark corner -- oh, I could give you many examples of the clothes that get forgotten by everyone but the canny little clothes moth.

No time like now to look after these odds and ends of winter clothes that ought to be getting cleaned and/off to a safe place. Wash the clothes that are washable and have the others cleaned, if you want to be absolutely safe. But thorough brushing, shaking, airing and sunning usually will rid a garment of any eggs or larvae that might be in it. After the cleaning, don't let the clothes sit around and wait and maybe collect more moths. Pack them away immediately in some spot that is proof against these pests. You can wrap them with heavy unbroken paper and seal all the edges with gummed paper strips. Or you can hang dresses and coats in garment bags that are absolutely tight -- not even the tiniest crack or opening for a hungry moth to enter. Be sure the bag is carefully sealed where the hanger comes out at the top.

And, as we said, clothes that are absolutely clean will keep safely in a clean tight cedar chest. Since trunks and even well-built boxes are not always entirely tight, any clothes stored in such places are safer if a pound of napthalene or paradichlorobenzene crystals are sprinkled in with them. These crystals are inexpensive and keep moths out. Napthalene comes in the form of flakes or moth balls.

Here's another word of caution from the experts. They warn you not to make the mistake of thinking that your clothes are safe by just putting some napthalene or paradichlorobenzene in your closet. These are effective remedies if you use them properly. But the fumes from these substances -- the fumes that do the damage to the moths, must be very concentrated. So you can depend on them only in tight chests or compartments where these fumes can't escape, where they'll penetrate every thread of your clothing.

Once more, remember that cleanliness is the safest and cheapest protection-- cleanliness and a tight storage place. Napthalene and paradichlorobenzene in the box or chest are added protection. These are the substances that the scientists have found effective against moths. Plenty of other so-called remedies do no good at all.

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